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Bronze sculptures : a thesis report

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BRONZE SCULPTURES

A Thesis Report

By

MICHAEL T. STORY

A thesis report submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

SCULPTURE

Portland State University
1978

Thoughts of the Thesis of Michael Story for the Masters
of Fine Arts in Sculpture presented April 10, 1978.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


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The Thesis discusses sculptures completed during the
period of study from October 1976 to April 1978 and
presented at the Department of Art and Architecture
Gallery April 10, 1978 to April 28, 1978.

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INTRODUCTION

Having spent nine somewhat fruitful years in various forms of artistic disciplines, I found that in 1974 an inward nudge of my spirit was leading me to leave the areas of painting and the gallery that I was associated with to face sculpture again, my first artistic love. I recall how lost I felt when I first considered the aspects of the lost wax bronze casting process. I was attending the Museum Art School in Portland, Oregon. The tug toward the casting process was constant. My efforts to explore and familiarize myself with this process was thwarted by the fact that, at that time, the Museum Art School had no foundry. Thus I had to settle on the welded steel sculptural process along with wood carving, stone carving, terra cotta, and resin sculpture in my B.F.A. thesis project. None of these fulfilled my artistic need. I returned to painting, which sold rather well, but left me even more empty. So for better or worse, I married bronze, the most difficult task master of all the sculptural processes I have tried.

From the beginning of my art training, bronze casting and the figure were ever present in my imagination. Before I could start, I had a few inner "tigers" to tame; patience, energy, time and money. Through a series of fortuitous circumstances, provision was made and quite an adequate amount of money was supplied for my needs each month. Within myself, I found the patience and energy. Time is always available.

When an opportunity to do a head study presented itself, I found that I was completely absorbed in a critical analysis of form in space. Certainly not a new concept, but a concept that had begun to meet the artistic leap my spirit had taken and it was the beginning of my journey back into sculpture.

My mind became a transfer point between my spirit and my physical being. Maybe a type of dredging in my conscious and sub-unconscious strata to find the tools that were ever needful for spiritual completion on the physical sphere of my sculpture.

I believe that the physical universe in which I find myself is not really as important as I have often believed. As my ideas and thoughts begin in the spirit and facilitate in my mind (and/or soul), it stands to reason that the last step in completion of an idea is putting it in physical presence; therefore, the energy of spirit or core of my being is much more important than the outward expression of such.

My first impressions had no form, merely a feeling of rightness and peace, coupled with a driving intensity I felt to pursue their spiritual implication to the ends of my technical abilities. As these impressions gained form, I refused to fall in love with them.

If the physical overtakes the spiritual core of inspiration, I have to conclude that what remains could only be a dry rustling intellectual exercise, lacking in fertile imagination.

SCULPTURAL PIECES AND EXPLANATIONS

HEAD STUDY NO. 1

Head Study No. 1 was the beginning of the end of my so-journing into three dimensional illusion. It was a step back to my heritage and joy of expressing in the third dimension.

My heritage is craft, technique, using my head, and going away from pure intellect, pure engineering and into the subconscious arena, and that final step into art.

I have to admit that I esteem craft abilities to a high degree and feel that it is necessary to perfect craft in order that the subliminal fleeting idea can be captured. An idea without form can only be experienced by the originator.

For this particular piece in my thesis, the balance between spirit and control of surface and form is manifested in the generation of form. I was concerned with getting back into the feel of sculpture.

HEAD STUDY NO. 1



FIGURE STUDY NO. 2

After having completed my first head study, I started to grasp the bronze casting technique and the fear of the process soon left. I completed one reclining figure study not in my thesis and it was a failure.

Figure Study No. 2 is directed more towards my love of form and the joy of working with the human figure.

Howard Hughes said, "I am more interested in nature and why we have seasons than in people." I am more interested in people and their relationships to nature; however, the balance between form and representative sculpture, in this work, far out-weighed the spiritual aspects that I am searching to define in my sculpture.

FIGURE STUDY NO. 2



SPIRIT OF GOSSIP

While working out the "bone structure" of my search for form, surface and the general engineering problems of sculpture, I was the victim of a bit of gossip.

I mention this only to point out that inspiration may sometimes come almost entirely from within, but on occasion may be triggered by outside experiences over which one has almost no control.

I first wanted to retaliate, but on reflection, I thought this was my chance to experiment with using form to express a spiritual condition.

Very simply, I used a tried and true symbol, horns and scales to "pinch the nerve" that represents evil and power in all of our western civilization. Secondly I offered a look at the results of gossip, trailing it out of the head of the piece. Thirdly, I used a casting of a dead sparrow, beautiful and pulsating in life, grotesque in decay, to represent the death of spirit that gossip attains in our relationship with one another.

SPIRIT OF GOSSIP



HEAD STUDY NO. 2

This study of a young Negro girl was done mainly because I had the opportunity. The time I had with the model was limited, which forced me to work faster than I usually would. In my opinion, it is a much more successful piece than Head Study No. 1. Due to time limitations, I was also compelled to work in a much more spontaneous fashion than in Head Study No. 1, paying more attention to the overall form and mass, and letting the details build themselves after the facts. Therefore, they fell into relatively concise integration of primary form and secondary detail.

Not nearly so important was the final finish. The chasing of the piece was very limited in scope with little filing or grinding. Until I made this piece, I was overly concerned with finish and with smooth bronze, which could very rapidly destroy form if not watched carefully.

HEAD STUDY NO. 2



PRIMAL CHOICE

This piece was conceived in order to show that the abstracted spiritual segment of my work could be presented with a temporal expression.

I believe the natural universe is easily experienced; ergo, we see, touch, taste, hear and feel. The spiritual universe is more abstract, and to many, it is experienced in fright and mistrust. Some authorities say we are gaining insight, or that we have lost our original heritage, or that the spiritual dimension does not exist at all.

My premise is in concurrence with a personal belief in God; therefore, the spiritual universe is an active portion of my life. It has more importance than the physical universe.

I perceive the physical universe as an expression of higher spiritual precepts, but in understanding these precepts, we are but fledglings.

In doing this piece, my intention was to differentiate between gratification of all my mental desire, which is impossible, and taking the chance that I am not the only spiritual/physical entity in the universe. I was compelled to express in my work this principle of duality in nature, physical vs. spiritual

Primal Choice was conceived in order to relate, in a temporal sense, that choice which all of us make in our own spirits.

I believe in a definite gulf fixed within myself that

cannot be bridged until I operate my free will. I want to acknowledge the higher spiritual precept and laws that balance the spiritual and physical planes of our existence.

In doing this piece, I have used a pure, abstract form to represent God's spirit and inspiration. I have taken this abstracted free form sculpture and juxtaposed what I consider symbols of perverted spiritual entities and again the dead sparrow as a death symbol.

These symbols, placed side by side, confronting the female figure, serve to portray that choice one must make.



PRIMAL CHOICE



AN EVE

I believe that the motivation for creating this work was just to see if I could do a standing life size bronze figure. After all, what kind of sculptor would I be if I could not execute the life size figure?

Generally I feel I have succeeded with what I had envisioned and with my generally pugnacious attitude intend to continue with my work, God willing.

AN EVE

